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DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

DAVIS, CALIFORNIA 95616

October 21, 1969

Dr. J. Lederberg
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

I was so dismayed and disturbed by your column in the S. F. Chronicle of October 19 that, although I do not generally succumb to the messianic impulse, I feel compelled to take issue with your statements therein. I quote, "Radiation was the first environmental factor proven, in the late H. J. Muller's experimental studies with fruit flies, to cause genetic damage.... Nevertheless, there is no direct way to prove that any gene mutations were ever produced in human germ cells by an exposure to radiation."

This is sophistry in its most malevolent form. It's akin to denying the existence of radioactivity because you can't say which atom will decay in the next few minutes.

Your comments on DNA repair and oxygen depletion imply that the cure for radiation damage is strangulation or anoxia. Your statements about chlorine will undoubtedly be used by fanatics to prove that city officials are trying to poison us. Your statements on cyclamates were extremely unfortunate in light of recent government action and to lump cyclamates with LSD must reflect your personal prejudice.

I have only briefly indicated the points I disagree with but have chosen to refute your article in detail in my molecular biology class. I will, however, continue to explain to them the advantages of the replica plating * technique while also pointing out the insight and significance of the Luria-Delbruck fluctuation test.

I do not yet believe that your intent in this and other columns is to deliberately confound and mislead but that is the result. You are serving causes and persons with whom I would hope you hold no brief. Times are difficult enough without a person of your talent adding to the general burden. Please desist.

Very truly yours,

Gordon Edlin
Associate Professor of Genetics

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* Genetics 41:367 '56
is rather sure elegant.